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ABSTRACT

A quick look at the literature in American Indian studies reveals that it is divided about equally between historical research and studies of contemporary American Indians, reflecting the strong influence of history and anthropology in the field. American Indian studies overlaps many disciplines. Characterized as an "area study," it is unified by the single theme of its link to the culture and experiences of American Indians as a people separate from the Euro-American culture. Many studies focus on American Indian demography, investigating the size, distribution, and composition of the historical and contemporary American Indian populations. The literature on the social and economic status of American Indians is relatively large, as is the literature on political organizations and legal institutions among historic and contemporary American Indian groups. The cultures of American Indians are extremely diverse, and broad generalizations are difficult to make. Many studies of spirituality and cultural survival can be found in the literature. A crucial distinction between the literature of the past and contemporary approaches is the modern assumption that the American Indian peoples are a dynamic and vital part of the American ethnic spectrum, not a population doomed to extinction. (Contains 103 references.) (SLD)

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